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Educational Background  
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### **Educational Background and Teaching Aspirations**

Throughout my years of public schooling, the expectations, perceptions and outcomes of my education have molded me into the person I am today. In terms of elementary schools, the expectation of the educational system was to help students function in public settings, and prepare them in the basic common core areas. In order to achieve this the educational system expected us to behave in specific ways, and follow the numerous rules laid out by the educator. We were to sit quietly at lunch, wait our turn, and even had classroom jobs. All major topic areas were taught and given equal levels of attention. My youth educational systems also encouraged students to acquire other areas of interest by providing specials in computer, library, art, music and physical education. When I reached middle school the overarching expectation was to prepare us for high school. Everything we did was reasoned as a preparation for high school. Here honor roll was introduced, as was the idea of achieving higher than expected. Students were expected to “Meet” the requirements for the class, but they could also “Exceed”. This grading term tied into a specific numerical category. In high school the educational expectations changed. It became about preparing students for their futures. The school expected all students to complete basic coursework, however the desire to push oneself was up to you. Each year the educational system also required students to reflect on their academic and personal growth by creating a student portfolio and presenting it to their parents, a peer, and a team of teachers. In addition, to graduate, the school also required all seniors to do a formal presentation on a topic of their choice for 30 minutes. The research for this project took place over the entire semester. Students were also required to complete at least 60 community service hours. Needless to say, the expectations on students did not solely deal with academics, they extended to preparing positive members of society once I hit high school.

I think that during my time in school the expectations of the business world on education shifted. For instance, I think that when I was younger the business world expected schools to prepare students to enter the workforce and have the necessary skills for work straight out of high school. However, as time went on, there was a greater push for attending college. I think that this was directly correlated to the business world wanting graduates and employees with even greater skill sets. Especially now it feels as though the business world expects schools to prepare students to earn higher degrees. Such expectations are evident to me through the media, parental expectations, and societal values.

While I was growing up my parents were very honest about their performance in school, but not their expectations of my learning. My mom said that she did okay, but mostly got low and average level grades in K-12. She told me that she was never very interested in school until she went to get her associates degree. My dad was not a fan of school. He got by, and has very nice cursive, however, he is a more hands on and mechanical person. When it came to the educational exception of my brother and I, my parents never pressured us to get good grades. They were proud of us when we did, and always supported us in our schoolwork. However, they

never outright stated “you need to get an A”, or that we needed to work harder. I think because of their experience in school, they were just happy that we did well. My parents also never bribed my brother and I to get the grades we did. I had many friends get paid for making the honor roll. My parents wanted school to be an intrinsic motivation of ours and therefore simply expressed their praise to us. Due to this, I think my motivation to academically work hard came from the internal factors exhibited by my parents.

Unlike a lot of my peers I had high expectations for the education I was receiving, especially in high school. Since I had aspirations to go to college I wanted to leave high school feeling prepared, and also bringing in some college level credits. I expected the learning to be fun, valuable, and most importantly worth my time. I had a few classes that centered around low-level busy work, which drove me crazy. In accordance to learning, I expected that the people teaching me would be understanding, kind, helpful and passionate. As a student who struggled with math, and would often seek out help, it was extremely important that I had a math teacher who understood my learning style and would work with me.

The set up of both my high school and middle school classes were very similar. In middle school my classes were set up as a team of four core teachers that were rotated through for each of the subjects. My high school was also set up into teams. Each set of core teachers would have a ‘team’ of 80 students that rotated between them. Each team’s classes were located in a ‘pod’, which was a larger room that contained all the lockers for the students and a few places to sit. One of my favorite aspects of Noble was the way academic community was established from middle school onwards. The use of academic teams allowed us to all have a ‘home’ space in the building. It also gave students a common group of teachers and peers to be around. In terms of class set-up, though, my middle school and high school experiences differed. In middle school our classes were generally in frontward facing rows. Many of my classes in high school had varied seating arrangements. There were groups, U shaped seating, and rows of long tables. My high school did not have desks, so each room had 8 or 9 large tables. At the front of each room was a whiteboard, and each classroom was equipped with a projector, from grades 7-12.

Once a sophomore, greater freedom was given in class choice, with numerous vocational school options. Generally we had four classes a day, a study period and a silent reading block. Classes swapped every other day, and usually ran about an hour. Many classes were based around lectures, conversations, and group work. My attention level depended on the class. In classes with conversations and hands-on work I was most engaged. In other classes, when the lights were off and a lecture was occurring, my eyes would start to close. During my time in high school I did take one online course, this was a negative experience for me as it felt like a lot of busy work, and it was hard to connect with.

During high school I took many AP classes, in an effort to both challenge myself and enter college with credits. The AP classes I took were mostly in the area of humanities, however I did take one course in Statistics. Many of these AP courses lent themselves to lecture based classes. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my coursework, as the teachers were passionate about the material. Passion is one of the most motivating factors for me as a student. There was a lot of researched and personal investigation in the classes I took. In my senior year I took another class called Morality and Justice. It was based off of a Harvard course created by Michael Sandell. This course pushed my thinking, and understanding of consistent moral values, around the

construct of “What’s the right thing to do?”. I truly enjoyed anything that was intellectually challenging. In terms of math I was always ahead of pace, however I struggled and often received help in anything I took. Although I did well in all of my general science classes, it was never a favorite of mine and therefore I never pushed myself to go further. Despite this, I felt as though my teacher senior year did an exceptional job making class hands-on and experiential. I think that the outcome of my education, and the feelings I had towards it, correlate to the amount of personal connections I shared with my teachers and my desire to work hard.

Throughout my time in school, there are a few teaching strategies that have stuck with me, good or bad. One of my favorite english teachers had the best teaching strategy for tests. She would give us all of the questions on the test in advance, so we could research our answers. Granted, this test was very long. However, if you did the work and studied you generally had all you needed to know for test day. I had one teacher who only taught in worksheets, this class wasn’t my favorite. Since Noble was an MLTI school, this allowed teachers to use other strategies and project ideas that were technologically based. In my classes we used programs such as Keynote, GarageBand, and iMovie. In math there was generally one teaching strategy; go over problems as a class and then practice them. There were never really any fun activities associated with the work in my math courses. Group work was another teaching strategy that was used in all levels in my schooling. This became an essential part of all classes, especially with the hands-on activities in science. I thrived in areas of individual or group work.

In essence, the strategies that did not always meet my needs were in lecture based settings. Although I found ways to do well in them, I often felt tired or bored. In addition, lecture based math classes were really difficult for me. During this type of instruction I would get lost in the process and become stumped or frustrated for the rest of class. Some strategies that met my learning needs were using conversations, or experiential learning in class. When I got to move around, interact, or make something, I got excited about my learning. The teacher who heavily influenced me to go into social studies was my AP Government teacher. This was the most hands-on and experiential class that I have ever been a part of. Since our AP Gov. class was cross-listed with We The People, we spent the year preparing for the AP test, and a competition based on arguing the constitution. In this class I had the opportunity to travel to the state house, attend a competition, go to a political rally, and visit Washington, D.C. for a week. This is where I finally fell in love with social studies, my least favorite topic area up until that point. It is because of her pedagogy, sincere care for students, and teaching strategies that she will always be one of my favorite teachers.

The ethnic diversity in all of my schools and classes was very little. My high school was a combination of three towns, however, once combined there was more diversity than in the Lebanon Elementary schools alone. I can count on two hands the amount of students that had a different ethnic or cultural diversity than my own. The students that were ethnically more diverse than the rest of the student body were all very popular, whether it be due to their personality or the intrigue of other students. In terms of socioeconomic status, my school was relatively low. Many students were on free and reduced lunch, and there was an economic divide based on the town you lived in. Students from North Berwick generally had more money than students from Berwick or Lebanon. This is partly due to the area each town was located in.

Since I am someone who has always really liked school, enjoys a specific way of learning, and has limited experience with cultural diversity, I think my background could hinder me as an educator. I am afraid that my love for school will not allow me to understand a student's dislike towards school. Student teaching was very eye-opening to me in this way, as I learned how to better relate to students who were having a hard time becoming engaged with the material. On a more positive note, I think that the qualities I value in teachers will shine through in my own teaching. Having such passionate teachers has made me realize how powerful passion is in the classroom. In whatever I teach I will find a passion of sorts. In addition, the way I learn might be exhibited in my teaching style. Therefore, I will have to work hard to teach to all types of thinking styles. Finally, the fact that I have always lived in a rural area will impact my ability to work with more diverse populations. Not only will it feel different for me, but I will have to personally work towards understanding more cultures in order to be the most effective teacher I can be. Since it is my aspiration to work with more diverse populations, I am excited to take on this work and expand my current knowledge.

When I look back, it is apparent that I have always wanted to be a teacher. My family had old desks in our basement that I used to play 'school' with. I found quickly that stuffed animals did not make the most proactive students, and therefore recruited my brother. In addition, when I started to do Everyday Math, I used to create my own math boxes for my parents and slide them under their door at night. Even when I wasn't at school, I was at school. When I got older I also became interested in social work, however I knew that my emotional capacity would suit me better as an educator. I think that my love of school stemmed from my love of the teachers I had. I looked up to them and they inspired me. In high school my teachers became one of the best support systems I could ask for. They were always onboard with my goals, dreams, and aspirations. They helped me brainstorm dates to the prom, make pros and cons lists for colleges, and became someone I could simply talk to about my life. Essentially, I wanted to be someone's inspiration, friendly face, mentor, educator, and support system. Teaching seemed like a great profession to enter into with this goal in mind, my love for academia, and a passion for helping others.

The superior educators in my life had four very important traits; they valued all walks of life, were passionate about their life's work, believed in their students, and looked at anything with a positive attitude. I continue to hold these traits as essential teaching characteristics. I think that due to the strong role models in my life, implementing these characteristics will be easier. Although I may not call every one of my students a 'god' or 'goddess', I will smile at each one, take time to talk to them, and boost their self esteem. I will try to represent all students and spread the love evenly, so that each student knows they are an integral part of my classroom. Quite simply put, I will find joy and love in all I teach. If it is a subject that is not my favorite, I will research it until I get excited about it. I will show my students this passion by having an excitement for learning, and teaching them, about the content. In addition, I will also share in my student's aspirations. I will do what I can to help them reach their goals, and celebrate all the small victories along the way. I will give them goals that I expect them to reach and let them know that they can do it. Most importantly though, I will instill with them the idea that failure is okay, and that I believe that they can achieve their goals if they keep working hard. Finally, I see

implementing positivity in my classroom as something as simple as smiling, laughing, and finding the glass half full-even if it is a struggle.

One of the most prominent things I hope to gain during my time as an educator is the feeling of 'fullness'. I desire to feel full of the love and respect I have for my students and colleagues. This is something I felt so strongly during student teaching, and it is a feeling I desire again. I cried the entire way home, due to how sad, happy, and loved I felt during my final day at Messalonskee Middle School. My heart felt the fullest it's ever been that day, and I left knowing I have the power to make a difference. I think with feelings like this, I know that I am in the right place, doing what I love. As an educator, I hope to inspire students to reach their goals, no matter how small they may be. I want to be the support system for students who feel like they have no one on their side. I want to make sure that my students know they are important, valued, and special. Lastly, I desire to learn more about myself through teaching. I think that working in my area of passion will allow me to better discover myself, my beliefs, and know further what I aspire out of a profession in teaching.

As a new teacher I hope to contribute my enthusiasm and passion to whichever school I'm in. Beyond that, I also want to make a difference in the educational world. After attaining my master's degree I aim to have practical knowledge in the areas of diversity, urban studies and multiculturalism. Since I feel as though all school curriculums should reflect local and global diversity, I desire to take my understanding and show other educators how to teach diversely to both diverse and non-diverse populations. Through my role as a teacher, and an educational leader in diversity, I aim to heighten the levels of social and racial tolerance for students in both urban and rural areas.

I think one of my greatest fears of entering teaching is the first year. I fear that I will not be able to have a life through all of the planning and preparing, and therefore harm my sanctity. In addition, because I strongly empathize with the feelings of others, I fear that in difficult times I will have trouble being the rock for my students if something emotionally distressing has happened among the student body, school, or in my personal life. Lastly, one of my major questions is: how do I encourage students to turn their work in on time, through a PBE system, without tardiness being factored into their grade or them being penalized for not turning it in at all? I found while I was student teaching, that some students, because they knew they could complete work at anytime, would not participate in specific projects, classwork or homework assignments. I understand that the work needs to be engaging and support a student, however, even when the work was tailored to what a student asked for it wouldn't be done until months later. I would like to know how I can foster intrinsic motivation for turning things in on time in a PBE system, that makes students accountable for their work and academically successful at their own pace.

Although I have these questions and feelings of wonder, there is no doubt in my mind that teaching is the profession for me. I am extremely passionate about being the best teacher I can, and excited to put in the effort so that all of my students feel valuable and knowledgeable in my classroom. A game that I played in my basement has turned into my career. I am becoming exactly what I wanted my grown-up self to be; a teacher.